

EXHIBIT 16

New N.Y. Budget Includes Historic Yeshiva Provision

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The New York State 2018-19 budget, enacted on the first day of Pesach, includes a major new provision that Agudath Israel of America describes as “historic” – for, in addition to continue funding of the nonpublic schools, New York has now for the first time recognized the unique nature of a yeshiva education.

As explained by Rabbi Chaim Dovid Zwiebel, Agudath Israel’s Executive Vice President, nonpublic schools in New York are required by law to provide education that is “substantial equivalent” to that offered in nonpublic schools. In recent years, some anti-yeshiva activists pointing to the relatively short programs of secular studies in many yeshivos, have claimed that yeshiva education fails to meet this legal standard, and have urged government to take action to force yeshivos to radically change their entire curriculum.

To help forestall such efforts, the new budget includes a new provision in the state’s Education Law addressing “substantial equivalency” in the yeshivas. The new law, for the first time, makes clear that any evaluation of a yeshiva’s compliance with the law must include “the entirety of the [school’s] curriculum” – i.e., limudei kodesh religious studies as well as

limudei chol secular studies. Further, it must take into account whether the curriculum “provides academically rigorous instruction that develops critical thinking skills.” These factors are clearly present in abundance in yeshiva learning.

The new law identifies four core curriculum subjects that must be taught in yeshiva elementary schools: English, Mathematics, History and Science. As for the high school level, the primary requirement is for academically rigorous instruction that develops critical thinking skills in students, the outcomes of which result in a “sound basic education.”

This new provision in the law was due to the tenacious leadership of Senator Simcha Felder. Senator Felder worked closely with Agudath Israel and a number of leading rabbinic and lay yeshiva community leaders in crafting legislation that recognizes the unique nature of yeshiva education.

The law also authorizes the State Education Commissioner to determine whether yeshivos are in compliance with the requirements. Agudath Israel has a close and longstanding relationship with the commissioner and the staff of the State Education Department, and looks forward to working together in the implementation of the new law.

Commented Rabbi Zwiebel: “We acknowledge that government has the right to ensure that children in all schools, including ours, receive a sound basic education that prepares them to function as productive citizens.

“What we take issue with is excessive government regulation or oversight that would require yeshivos to conform to the same curricular requirements as those used in the public schools. In order to carry out the fundamental religious mission for which they were created, yeshivos need to be given great latitude in designing a rigorous academic program that may differ from that offered in the public schools but nonetheless gives students the most important skills they need to be productive members of society.

“We think the Felder bill strikes an appropriate balance along those lines. Kudos to Senator Felder for his historic contribution to the ongoing development of the yeshiva community in New York.”

In other developments of interest to the nonpublic school community, the new budget allocates over \$200 million for continued funding of Mandated Services, Comprehensive Attendance Policy (CAP), Safety and Security, Technology, STEM and other programs.

Particularly noteworthy is the fact that funding for STEM instruction in the state's nonpublic schools was increased from \$5 million to \$15 million – thanks in large measure to the effort of the Orthodox Union.

Also noteworthy is the fact that the budget restored \$7 million to schools in NYC, Rochester and Buffalo for the cost of immunization recordkeeping. This funding was one of the major accomplishments of Agudath Israel in last year's budget, which saw the reimbursement rise from .60 cents per pupil to close to \$30. Unlike CAP and other mandated services, immunization reimbursement is not guaranteed at a particular rate, and the Governor's initial proposed executive budget for 2018-19 eliminated such funding. Agudah activists worked long and hard to ensure that this funding stream would be restored in the final budget. The issue was a major focus of Agudath Israel's Mission to Albany on March 6th, and the efforts eventually bore fruit in the final budget.

Finally, Agudath Israel noted the re-appropriation of the \$60 million CAP shortfall and the additional \$25 million specifically allotted by the Governor's office to nonpublic schools for the Smart Schools Bond Act (classroom technology). Both items were Agudath Israel advocacy efforts last year and Agudath Israel is pleased to see those efforts preserved.

Rabbi Yeruchim Silber, Agudah's Director of New York Government Relations and its chief representative in Albany, hailed the assistance of all those involved in the effort. "It is very gratifying working with the Agudah staff, board members and the many volunteers who trekked to Albany both at our March 6th mission as well as on a number of mini missions to convey our concerns to lawmakers. It is this combined effort that ensures our success," said Rabbi Silber.

(YWN World Headquarters – NYC)